

Has the True Gospel of Jesus Been Found?

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The Gospel of Barnabas

The time has finally come: the so-called “Gospel of Barnabas” is now available in German. It carries the title “Das Barnabasevangelium. Wahres Evangelium Jesu, genannt Christus, eines neuen Propheten von Gott, der Welt gesandt, gemäß dem Bericht des Barnabas, seines Apostels“ (The Gospel of Barnabas. The True Gospel of Jesus, called the Christ, a New Prophet of God Sent to the World, According to the Report of Barnabas, His Apostle).

The German publication of this text was undertaken by a German married couple which has converted to Islam. Both are members of the mystic Dervish order of the Naqshbandiyya, whose roots extend back into the fourteenth century. The Turban-Verlag, the publishing company founded by them several years ago and in which the Gospel of Barnabas has appeared, offers titles by Muslim authors, for the most part. The translation of the Gospel of Barnabas into German has turned out from the linguistic point of view just as successfully as the sound external design of the book.

What is the significance of this Gospel of Barnabas? The reader who studies the short foreword and the cover text could gain the impression that an original source for early Christianity finally has re-emerged after many centuries.

The Italian and Spanish Manuscripts of the Gospel of Barnabas

The publication of the Gospel of Barnabas in German (it has appeared up to the present in at least six to eight other languages) is a continuation of the Christian-Muslim controversy about a text which itself claims to be the only true gospel. It is held by most Muslim apologists to be the only true gospel of Jesus Christ, while nearly every Nonmuslim rejects it as a forgery from the Middle Ages. This controversy began as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the first judgements pro and contra the Gospel of Barnabas were published in Europe and India.

For a long time, the only known copy of this gospel was one in Italian, which today can be viewed in the Austrian National Library in Vienna by any interested person. When one is in Vienna and holds this slim volume in his hands, one can hardly believe that this book has caused so much commotion between Christians and Muslims in the last one hundred years.

Apart from the Italian manuscript, two Spanish manuscripts from the eighteenth century are known, one of which must be considered as completely missing, while the other is an incomplete manuscript rediscovered only in 1976 in Sydney, where it is still to be found today. Apart from the Italian and the two Spanish manuscripts, a Greek, Latin, or Hebrew manuscript has never been found and genuine historical proof that the Gospel of Barnabas existed before the sixteenth century has never been provided.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Christians in the Islamic world were confronted with so many rumors about this supposedly “true” gospel, mere fragments of which had been published at this point, that two employees of the Anglican Church, Lonsdale and Laura Ragg, decided to produce a complete edition and translation of the Italian text into English. The bilingual Italian-English edition appeared in 1907. The Gospel of Barnabas was translated into Arabic, then, in 1908. Thereafter, it played an enormous role in the Islamic world as a weapon against Christianity.

Significance of the Gospel of Barnabas

Why do Muslims support this gospel so vehemently? Because it claims to be the only gospel written by a witness of the life of Jesus, and to contain the truth about Christianity. At the same time, it rejects those fundamental articles of Christian faith which Islam also dismisses. The Gospel of Barnabas denies the divine sonship of Jesus, his redemptive death on the Cross, and his resurrection. As a “Christian” gospel, it thereby becomes the chief witness against—so the Muslim opinion—degenerate and distorted Pauline Christianity while, at the same time, it confirms the statements of the Koran. The idea that true Christian revelation thus is not inconsistent with Islam, but rather is in harmony with it, is a Muslim dogma which is repeatedly put forward and which—in the Muslim view—is confirmed by the Gospel of Barnabas.

The gospel itself, which combines Jewish, Christian, and Muslim elements, relates the story of Jesus and his disciples from the announcement of Jesus’ birth to his death. It reports about Jesus’ miracles, his parables and teachings, the Last Supper, the betrayal, and about his trial and crucifixion, to which the Gospel of Barnabas gives an Islamic interpretation: Jesus does not die on the Cross, but rather Judas. This “substitution theory”, which says that Judas was mistaken for Jesus and died in his place on the Cross, is certainly the most common opinion about the Crucifixion to be found among Muslim theologians today. The only statement in the Koran about the Crucifixion, in Sura 4,157–158, gives only vague hints about the event and could be so interpreted that not Jesus, but rather another, was crucified. With its declaration that this other person was Judas, the Gospel of Barnabas, in a certain sense, interprets the Koran.

The Gospel of Barnabas— an authentic source of early Christianity?

For every Nonmuslim who would like to defend the Gospel of Barnabas, but not show a partiality for Islam, there are certainly serious reasons to doubt the authenticity of this gospel, for everything points to a date of composition between the fourteenth and sixteenth century. Much more difficult to answer is the question of the intention behind the Gospel of Barnabas and the circumstances of its composition. Nonmuslims generally assume that a former Christian, who had converted to Islam and was thus familiar with Christianity as well as Islam, could have written such a gospel. This could have occurred as an act of revenge against Christianity on the basis of experiences made under the Spanish Inquisition in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, since Spain is a possible place of origin for the Gospel of Barnabas.

Since Muslim apologists assume that the Gospel of Barnabas is an early Christian document, they attempt to prove the authenticity of the gospel by looking for traces or forerunners of the text in early Christian church history. Several documents from early Christian church history are put forward to “prove” that the author of the Gospel of Barnabas and of these early Christian documents are identical.

Among the documents which are cited by Muslim apologists for this purpose belongs the short Epistle of Barnabas: it contains, however, only 21 short chapters, while the Gospel of Barnabas comprises 222 long chapters. Muslims cite further the Records of Barnabas:¹ this is a pseudoepigraphic work in Greek from the fifth century. The frequently mentioned Codex Barocci

¹ Cf. Adolf Harnack, „Barnabas“, in: Albert Hauck (ed.), Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche, vol. 2, Leipzig 1897/98, pp. 410–413, here: pp. 411–412.

39 is, like the previous work cited, only a short text fragment² which gives no indication that it could be in agreement with the present Gospel of Barnabas. The “Decretum Gelasianum de libris recipiendis et non recipiendis” from the fourth or fifth century A.D.,³ names, to be sure, a Barnabas Gospel in its list of texts,⁴ but nothing from this Barnabas Gospel has remained preserved, so the idea that this Barnabas gospel could have something to do with the present text must remain pure speculation. A similar situation exists in regard to the “Catalogue of 60 Canonical Books”⁵ from the seventh and eighth centuries, which lists a Barnabas gospel by name. However, all these documents, as well as early Christian church history as a whole, do not provide any indications at all that a connection with that Gospel of Barnabas ever existed, which is at the center of the Christian-Muslim controversy.

The Gospel of Barnabas at issue today contains Islamic ideas, which—although, apart from the person of Muhammad, Islam is nowhere spoken of officially—call the Koran and Muslim tradition strongly to mind. Since Islam originated only in the seventh century A.D., the gospel can not date from the early Christian period. A number of statements in the Gospel of Barnabas, moreover, are irreconcilable with the history and geography of Palestine, so that it appears hardly conceivable that the author of the Gospel of Barnabas could have lived in Palestine. More than this, a reliable source which reports about the contents of the gospel and which dates from before the beginning of the eighteenth century is lacking. But even more than this, several indications in the text itself speak in favor of a late medieval or early modern date of composition, that is, between the fourteenth and sixteenth century. The following examples thus make it improbable that the text was composed in the first post-Christian century:

The Gospel of Barnabas makes the accusation of the falsification of the Old Testament⁶ through the human traditions of the “false Pharisees”⁷, although the party of the Pharisees originated only between 135 and 104 B.C.

Several prophets, such as Adam, Abraham, Ismael, Moses, David, and Jesus, the son of Mary, are confirmed as “messengers of God”.⁸ This is, of course, the view of the Koran, but it is not a conception in Christianity, which draws a considerable distinction between Adam, Abraham, and Jesus and does not characterize all equally as “messengers”.

In the Gospel of Barnabas, Adam even recites the Islamic confession of faith,⁹ which, of course, no one could have known in the early Christian period, since Islam originated only in the seventh century A.D.

² The text fragment is cited by Johann Ernst Grabe, *Spicilegium SS. Patrum ut et Haeticorum Seculi Post Christum natum I-III*. Oxoniae 1698–1699, here vol. I, p. 302. Grabe is of the opinion that the fragment comes from the Gelasius Decretal, which is purely an hypothesis.

³ Cf. the list of apocryphal texts in Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. W. Schneemelcher, 2 vols., London 1963–1965, here vol. 1, pp. 47–49.

⁴ Cf. on this point Ernst von Dobschütz (ed.), *Das Decretum Gelasianum de Libris recipiendis et non recipiendis*, Leipzig 1912.

⁵ Cf. Theodor Zahn, *Geschichte des Neutestamentlichen Kanons*, vol. 2, Erlangen/Leipzig 1890, pp. 289–293.

⁶ According to the Gospel of Barnabas, the Book of David and the Book of Moses are said to have been falsified. Lonsdale and Laura Ragg, *The Gospel of Barnabas*, Oxford 1907, CXXIV/284 + CLIX/370. (The roman numeral indicates the chapter of the Gospel and the following Arabic number the page of the Italian manuscript.)

⁷ *Ibid.*, CLXXXIX/424.

⁸ *Ibid.*, LV/130.

⁹ *Ibid.*, XXXIX/88.

As the Gospel of Barnabas reports, the promise of the birth of Jesus was given to Ismael, and not to Isaac,¹⁰ and Ismael was to be sacrificed by Abraham instead of Isaac: this is the Islamic view of the story of Abraham, but it is not a Christian conception.

In the Gospel of Barnabas, Jesus is not descended from David. In the Bible, the statement of Jesus' descent from David is clearly recorded.

In the Gospel of Barnabas, the command is given by God to Mary and Joseph to keep Jesus away from wine, strong drink, and impure meat¹¹—that is, pork: the prohibition of pork and wine is, however, an Islamic prohibition, not a Christian one.

According to the Gospel of Barnabas, Jesus is sent only to Israel:¹² this corresponds to Muslim theology, which assumes that each historical prophet was sent only to his own particular people. Only Muhammad, in the Muslim view, was sent to the whole world.

When Jesus, in the Gospel of Barnabas, receives his revelation at the age of thirty, he is bathed in a bright light and surrounded by angels while accomplishing his midday prayers, while the angel Gabriel gives Jesus a book which penetrates to his heart.¹³ It is a Muslim view that Gabriel conveyed Muhammad's message to him.

In the Gospel of Barnabas, Jesus refers to Muhammad as the greater of the two¹⁴ whose shoelaces he is not worthy enough to untie. Here, Jesus assumes the role played by John the Baptist in the New Testament.

In the Gospel of Barnabas, Jesus announces the coming of Muhammad and already speaks the name of Muhammad. Jesus asks God to send Muhammad to save the world. In Jesus' time, no one knew that, six centuries after Jesus' death, Muhammad, on the Arabian peninsula, would claim to be sent by God and to preach the truth. In the Christian view, it is impossible that Jesus announced Muhammad and asked God, his father, to send Muhammad.

The crucifixion of Judas in the Gospel of Barnabas does not agree with the reports in the Christian Gospels. Here, an Islamic interpretation of the Crucifixion is offered which, however, could be reconciled with the only reference in the Koran to the Crucifixion (Sura 4,157–158).

The Gospel of Barnabas already undertakes an apologetic interpretation of Christianity when it alludes to the idea that the Apostle Paul has deviated from some Christian dogmas. Thus, for example, Barnabas laments having been seduced by Paul into adopting the teaching of Jesus' divine sonship. The idea that Paul was the "spoiler" of original Christianity is a view repeated again and again by European Bible critics and Islamic apologists equally. For Christians remaining true to the Bible, though, this must be a false view.

At the same time, it must be stressed here that there are also statements in the Gospel of Barnabas which cannot be reconciled with either the Koran or with the Bible. Among those statements deviating from the Koran are, for example, Barnabas' comments concerning Hell as merely a temporary place of residence for the sinner.¹⁵ The Koran leaves no doubt whatsoever that those who are once exiled to Hell must remain there eternally.

¹⁰ Ibid., XLIII/102.

¹¹ Ibid., II/6.

¹² Ibid., LXXII/190.

¹³ Ibid., X/14 + CLXVIII/388.

¹⁴ Ibid., XCVII/222.

¹⁵ The Gospel of Barnabas testifies to the complete freedom of the human being to decide either for good or for evil: *ibid.*, CLV/360.

Also inconsistent with the Koran is the oft-repeated statement in the Gospel of Barnabas that Muhammad is the Messiah, while it at the same time repeatedly denies that Jesus is the Messiah. It characterizes Jesus, however, as “chrissto” (Christ). The assumption, therefore, is that the author did not know that “Christ” is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word for “Messiah” (“the Anointed”).

In the Koran, Jesus is born in Jerusalem; in the Gospel of Barnabas, in Bethlehem.¹⁶ In the Koran, he is born under a palm tree; in the Gospel of Barnabas, in an inn.¹⁷ In the Koran, Mary suffers much pain at Jesus’ birth (cf. Sura 19,23); in the Gospel of Barnabas, she gives birth to Jesus painlessly.¹⁸ The Koran recognizes seven heavens (Sura 2,29); the Gospel of Barnabas, nine.¹⁹ The tenth heaven there is Paradise. The Gospel of Barnabas clearly pleads for monogamy,²⁰ while the majority of Muslims recognize in Sura 4,3 the permission for marriage with up to four women.

The Gospel of Barnabas itself stresses that the original Biblical gospel was falsified. If Barnabas actually would have been a contemporary of Jesus, then the formation of the New Testament would not yet have been concluded. With this statement, the Gospel of Barnabas would have forecast its own fate. In addition, his geographical and historical mistakes make clear that the author of the Gospel of Barnabas can neither ever have visited Palestine nor can he have lived in the first post-Christian century:

In the Gospel of Barnabas, Nazareth is a town on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Nazareth, however, stands upon a hill some distance from the Sea of Galilee. According to the report in the Gospel of Barnabas, Jesus ascends from the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum. Capernaum, however, lies directly on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. According to the description in the Gospel of Barnabas, Nineveh lies near the Mediterranean coast. It, however, is to be found in the interior on the banks of the Tigris.

In the Gospel of Barnabas, the dates given for the birth of Jesus, compared with the terms of office of Pilate, Ananias, and Caiaphas, do not agree with the historical record. The Gospel of Barnabas reports 600,000 Roman soldiers in Palestine.²¹ There were, however, perhaps so many soldiers only in the entire Roman Empire, but certainly not in Palestine. The Gospel of Barnabas also reports 17,000 Pharisees at the time of the Old Testament. The party of the Pharisees, however, originated only in the second century before Christ.²² The Gospel of Barnabas describes a European summer: “everything bears fruit”.²³ In Palestine, however, it rains in winter, and in the summer the land is dry.

The editors of the first Italian-English edition of the Gospel of Barnabas, Lonsdale and Laura Ragg, in addition, point to conspicuous parallels between the Barnabas gospel and the works of the great Italian poet Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), such as *La divina commedia* (The Divine Comedy), and, in particular, to Dante’s representation of Heaven, Hell, and Paradise.²⁴ So, for example, the number of nine or, including Paradise, ten heavens, as well as the subdivision of Hell

¹⁶ Ibid., III/6.

¹⁷ Ibid., III/6.

¹⁸ Ibid., III/8 + V/14.

¹⁹ Ibid., CV/240 + CLXXVIII/402.

²⁰ Ibid., CXV/266.

²¹ Ibid., XCI/210.

²² Johann Maier, *Geschichte der jüdischen Religion*, Berlin 1972, pp. 71ff.

²³ Lonsdale and Laura Ragg, *The Gospel of Barnabas*, Oxford 1907, CLXIX/390.

²⁴ Ibid., Introduction, p. xlii.

into seven centers in the Gospel of Barnabas²⁵ agrees with Dante's discussion of the ten heavens.²⁶ In regard to the direct relationship of both texts to each other, Lonsdale Ragg, an expert in Italian medieval literature, has speculated that the Gospel of Barnabas and Dante's Divine Comedy most likely originated independently of each other, but, in regard to the milieu in which they originated, both stand in a close relationship to each other.²⁷ The most probable date of composition of the Gospel of Barnabas lies, for Lonsdale Ragg, between 1300 and 1350.²⁸ Subsequent investigators have expanded this time span to as late as the sixteenth century. The following facts are evidence for a medieval date of composition:

According to the description in the Gospel of Barnabas, the "year of jubilee" is celebrated every one hundred years,²⁹ while the Old Testament names a period of fifty years. In the year 1300, Pope Boniface VIII fixed the date for the celebration of the year of jubilee as once in every hundred years. But already in 1343, Clement VI shortened the period to fifty years and announced the next jubilee celebration for 1350. Thus, the interval between celebrations of the year of jubilee was fixed at one hundred years, as the Gospel of Barnabas describes it, only in the period between 1300 and 1343.³⁰ Urban II, in 1389, shortened the interval still further to thirty-three years, and Paul II, in 1470, fixed a twenty-five-year interval, which has been retained to the present.³¹

The Gospel of Barnabas urges behavior patterns which remind one strongly of monastic asceticism. Thus, in several passages, laughing is condemned as a sin,³² but crying counts as a sign of the spiritual life.³³ The Gospel of Barnabas cites Bible verses according to the Latin Vulgate translation, which was completed only at the end of the fourth century and became the official Catholic Bible. The Gospel of Barnabas reports that Jesus and his disciples had "kept the forty days".³⁴ The forty-day fast before Easter was introduced only in the fourth century and is supposed to be a reminder of the suffering and death of Jesus, which was impossible before his death. The Barnabas gospel mentions a gold coin: the dinar, comprised of 60 minuti.³⁵ This coin was used for just a short time in medieval Spain, a point of argument which appears to support the thesis of a Spanish origin for the Gospel of Barnabas. In the Barnabas gospel, wooden barrels are mentioned as a method for storing wine;³⁶ in the Near East, however, leather wineskins were usual. In contrast to the Koran, the Gospel of Barnabas describes how Mary delivers her child without suffering pain,³⁷ a teaching which first came into fashion in the Church in the Middle Ages. The Gospel of Barnabas stresses the importance of alms, fasting, pilgrimages, and fivefold daily

²⁵ Ibid., CXXXV/310ff.

²⁶ So Miguel Asin, *Islam and the Divine Comedy*, London 1926, p. 88.

²⁷ Lonsdale Ragg, „Dante and the ‚Gospel of Barnabas‘“, in: *Modern Language Review* 3/1907, pp. 157–165.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 164.

²⁹ Lonsdale and Laura Ragg, *The Gospel of Barnabas*, Oxford 1907, LXXXII/190.

³⁰ The preferred dating of the composition of the Gospel of Barnabas in the fourteenth century is assumed on the basis of this fixing of the celebrations of the year of jubilee.

³¹ W. Lurz, „Heiliges Jahr“, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 5, Freiburg 1960/1980, pp. 125–126.

³² Lonsdale and Laura Ragg, *The Gospel of Barnabas*, Oxford 1907, LXXXII/190; CII/234.

³³ Ibid., CII/236.

³⁴ Ibid., XCII/212.

³⁵ Ibid., LIV/128.

³⁶ Ibid., XLII/354.

³⁷ Ibid., III/8.

prayer, which Jesus also performs,³⁸ whereby the text indicates a period after the origin of Islam in the seventh century. The forbidden fruit in Paradise, which the Old Testament does not specify by name, is said in the Gospel of Barnabas to be an apple,³⁹ also a development from later church history.

These and several other points form the basis of most of the treatises and papers written by non-Muslim authors in rejection of the assumption that the present-day Gospel of Barnabas in the Italian language is a document from early church history.

Has the Gospel of Barnabas been “concealed from the public”?

To the present day, papers rejecting the authenticity of the Gospel of Barnabas are published in some Islamic countries—above all by Christians—while the efforts of Muslim writers, also to the present, are aimed at “proving” that this Gospel of Barnabas is the only true gospel, and that the four gospels of the New Testament are forgeries. The German translation of the Italian Gospel of Barnabas must be considered in this light. This publication essentially limits itself, however, to the text itself and treats the gospel as though there were no question that the author is the New Testament apostle Barnabas himself. Only a cited newspaper report speaks of the “inevitable questions raised about its authenticity and about exegetical points”, without elaborating on which questions about authenticity could be meant here. The brief foreword to the book, with the title “Zur Geschichte des Barnabas-Evangeliums” (On the History of the Gospel of Barnabas), contains only a fraction of this history and mentions not at all the many texts and arguments which up to now have been brought forward to disprove the authenticity of the Gospel of Barnabas as an early Christian gospel. In the last analysis, it is the ideology of the individual observer which decides how much authenticity is granted to the Gospel of Barnabas. For Muslims, it confirms the Koran and Islamic dogmas and is, therefore, true, while for Christians, it stands in contradiction to the Old and New Testaments and, thus, is false. It is for this reason, finally, that it is endorsed by Muslims and rejected by Christians.

The endorsement of this gospel’s authenticity always goes hand in hand with the Muslim claim that the Christian church has attempted to conceal this true gospel from the public. The opposite, however, is the case: the first efforts to produce a complete text of the gospel were made by Christians in 1907. Since this time, the Gospel of Barnabas has been available in a number of languages. No one in Europe had any interest in a new apocryphal text before the increase of Muslim statements in favor of the gospel.

The foreword of the German translation

In conclusion, some statements from the foreword to the present German translation of the Gospel of Barnabas should be examined:

1. The claim made in the cover text that “an original text (of the Gospel of Barnabas) was found recently in Turkey” unfortunately does not correspond to verifiable fact. The publishers of the Gospel of Barnabas certainly have never seen this “original text”, or even a photograph of it, since they cite as their source merely a newspaper article from the Turkish daily “Türkiye” from July 25, 1986. At the beginning of the 1980s, several newspaper articles in Turkey about the discovery of an “old Bible manuscript” in a cave near Hakkari in southern Anatolia, in fact, did appear. The

³⁸ Ibid., LXXXIX/206.

³⁹ Ibid., XXXIX/90.

weight of the find was said to amount to fifty kilograms, and its age was determined by the radio-carbon method (C14) to be 1900 years. The text was said to be the original Gospel of Barnabas in the “Arami-Suryani language” (the foreword of the German translation now calls this language “Aramaic”), which the Council of Iznik (Nicaea) in 325 is said to have suppressed.⁴⁰ Attention supposedly was drawn to the manuscript when it was attempted to smuggle it out of the country over the eastern Turkish border. A warning was also attached not to let this text fall into the hands of Christians, since they certainly would destroy it.⁴¹ Only a short time later, there appeared a corrective statement from Ron Pankow, from Istanbul, which made clear that merely several manuscripts of the New Testament and a manuscript containing the entire Bible, which were Nestorian texts in Aramaic and, at most, four hundred years old, were found in Turkey. This discovery, however, according to Pankow, had nothing to do with a Barnabas gospel possibly from the period of the early Christian church.⁴²

Such a discovery, by the way, would have been a sensation around the world. Its great age alone would have made the text universally known, but much more if it would have been a gospel. After all, no Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, or Latin original of the Gospel of Barnabas could be found so far. Such a document would form the final element in the Muslim train of argument in favor of the authenticity and age of the text.

2. The foreword to the German edition takes up the claim brought forward again and again by the Muslim side that in Cyprus, in the grave of the martyred Barnabas, the Gospel of Barnabas was found lying upon his breast. This, however, is not the case. There is not one historically verifiable bit of evidence that a precursor to the only two known manuscripts of the Gospel of Barnabas, in Italian and in Spanish, existed in the early Christian period, let alone that these existing manuscripts ever came into contact with Cyprus. From where, then, does this claim come?

It comes from a Cypriot legend from the fifth century which, according to information from an author from the sixteenth century, is said to report that Barnabas appeared to the Bishop of Salamis (Cyprus) in a vision and told him of a cave, a coffin, and a body, on the breast of which the Bishop would find the gospel that Barnabas had copied with his own hands after he had received it from the apostle and evangelist Matthew.⁴³ Thus, this legend—whose historical reliability, by the way, has been doubted repeatedly—clearly has to do with the Gospel of Matthew and not with the Gospel of Barnabas. The Muslim side, however, has re-interpreted this legend to read that Barnabas himself wrote the gospel.

3. The claim that the same Gospel of Barnabas finds “a first certain reference” in the so-called “Gelasius Decretal” from the fifth century, reported in the German edition as a fact (p. 8), also cannot be allowed to remain unchallenged. The “Decretum Gelasianum de libris recipiendis et non recipiendis”, possibly of southern Gallic or northern Italian origin and from the end of the fifth or beginning of the sixth century, was named after Pope Gelasius (reigned 492–496). Some parts were attributed to Pope Damasus (reigned 366–384). In the fifth part of the Decretal there is, among other items, a catalogue of apocryphal texts, that is, texts rejected by the Church as uncanonical. Among these, along with several other gospels attributed to James, Peter, or Andrew, there is listed a “Gospel of Barnabas”⁴⁴ with the title “Evangelium nomine Barnabae

⁴⁰ So the article „Barnabas Bible Found“, in Arabia 4/1985/ 1405/ No. 41/ Jan.–Febr./ Rabi Al-Thani, p. 46. Similar is also “Original Bible of Barnabas Found in Turkey”, in: The Minaret 12, 3; 1. + 16. April, 1985, n.p.

⁴¹ So the article „Barnabas Bible Found“, in Arabia 4/1985/ 1405/ No. 41/ Jan.–Febr./ Rabi Al-Thani, p. 46. Similar is also “Original Bible of Barnabas Found in Turkey”, in: The Minaret 12, 3; 1. + 16. April, 1985, n.p.

⁴² Ron Pankow, „The Barnabas Bible?“, in: Arabia 1985/1405//March–April/ Rajib, n.p.

⁴³ Acta Sanctorum Boland, Antwerp 1698, Part 2, pp. 422–450.

⁴⁴ Cf. the list of apocryphal texts in E. Hennecke, New Testament Apocrypha, ed. H. Schneemelcher, vol. 1, Tübingen 1959, pp. 47–49.

apocryphum”⁴⁵ or, in another reading, “Barnabas et apostoli”, from which it is clear that this gospel, contrary to the repeated later claim by the Muslim side, in any case cannot have been written in opposition to the gospel reports of the other apostles. There is no proof at all for the claim that this gospel mentioned in the Gelasius Decretal—of which no one knows more than the mere name since not a single text fragment has survived—could be identical with the gospel probably composed in the later Middle Ages.

4. The foreword to the German edition also retells the story from the foreword of the Spanish edition about how a monk named Fra Marino is said to have removed the manuscript of the gospel from the library of Pope Sixtus V (reigned 1585–1590) while the Pope, who wanted to show Marino the Gospel of Barnabas in his library, suddenly fell asleep. Bored, Fra Marino looked around the library and the first book he happened to take from the shelf was the same Gospel of Barnabas. He concealed it in his cloak and removed it from the papal library after the Pope had awakened and led him out of the library. Fra Marino studied the Barnabas gospel and became a Muslim. Later, he fled to Istanbul. This story is cited by the advocates of the authenticity of the text—as also in the present German edition—as a milestone among the references to the Gospel of Barnabas in the Middle Ages, without taking into account the fact that this story is found in the Gospel of Barnabas itself, which calls itself a genuine gospel. This story, thus, cannot contribute much to proving the historicity of the text.⁴⁶

According to the information for the press included with the book, the publication is intended “to promote ... intercultural dialogue”. Christians who are convinced of the truth of the New and Old Testaments will be able to reject the Gospel of Barnabas as merely one of many forgeries. Muslim theologians, though, understand “dialogue” in general rather as the process of proving the superiority of Islam, and perhaps also as the uncovering of misunderstandings between the two religions, but in no case as the abandonment of Islamic positions and dogmas. But, whoever reads the introduction to and the text of the Gospel of Barnabas gets to know only the Muslim view of this text and gains the impression that an original historical source from the first century is here made available in German. The reader, however, is given no indication of the many objections to the claims of authenticity for the Gospel of Barnabas. In any case, this book easily will take its place in the German book market, with its bestsellers about Jesus, and their numerous theories deviating from the Bible, sprouting up everywhere.

⁴⁵ Cf. Ernst von Dobschütz, *Das Decretum Gelasianum De Libris Recipiendis et Non Recipiendis. Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 38.4, Leipzig 1912.

⁴⁶ A ca. 150-page description of the influence of the Gospel of Barnabas in the Islamic and western worlds is found in: Christine Schirmacher, *Mit den Waffen des Gegners*, Berlin 1992.

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